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C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 001644

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND IPA; NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/LOGGERFO

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [PTER](#)

SUBJECT: CONTINUING FATAH-HAMAS FRICTION

REF: A. OSC GMP20060421537004

[1](#)B. JERUSALEM 1622
[1](#)C. JERUSALEM 1590

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles. Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Supporters of Fatah and Hamas continue to clash in the wake of Khalid Meshaal's statements in Damascus on April 21, the appointment of Jamal Abu Samhadanah to the Interior Ministry, and Abu Mazen's subsequent cancellation of that appointment. Damascus-based Hamas leader Meshaal, speaking in Syria on the anniversary of the killing of former Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, indirectly accused Fatah and Abu Mazen of betraying the Palestinian cause. Meshaal took specific exception with Abu Mazen's use of the word "hakira" (despicable, mean, base) to characterize the April 17 Tel Aviv suicide bombing, as well as his opposition to the appointment of Abu Samhadanah and the formation of a new security force. Meshaal's statements sparked angry rhetoric and demonstrations, with Fatah stalwarts accusing Meshaal of attempting to start a civil war. Some Hamas government officials have disassociated themselves from Meshaal's statements, but have not taken issue with Meshaal. Hamas and Fatah representatives are meeting in Gaza to tamp down the situation; the larger issues that are feeding the confrontation will apparently wait until Abu Mazen's return to the region at the end of the month and his next opportunity to meet directly with Prime Minister Hanniyyah.

Khalid Meshaal Statement

[1](#)2. (C) Statements made late on April 21 by Damascus-based Hamas political bureau chief Khalid Meshaal, speaking at a Palestinian refugee camp outside Damascus on the anniversary of the death of former Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, led to verbal and violent clashes in the following days between Hamas and Fatah supporters, particularly in Gaza. In his speech (ref (a)), Meshaal took broad aim at Fatah and President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), blaming the outgoing PA government for theft of funds and even office supplies, and further charging that they are now conspiring to bring down an elected government. He supported the recent appointment of Jamal Abu Samhadanah to the Ministry of the Interior and the creation of an additional security force (ref (b)). Meshaal took specific issue with Abu Mazen's denunciation of the

April 17 suicide bombing in Tel Aviv (ref (c)), an act Abu Mazen described in very strong terms as "hakira:" base, despicable, mean. Meshaal asserted instead that attacks like the one that occurred in Tel Aviv are not despicable; what is really "hakira" is to go to Tel Aviv to "get drunk."

Fatah Reactions

13. (C) Fatah supporters reacted immediately and violently to Meshaal's accusations. Presidential Advisor Ahmad Abd al-Rahman promptly took to the airwaves, focusing on the Abu Samhadanah appointment and creation of an additional security force, and calling these steps "a poisonous recipe for civil war." Demonstrations started in Gaza on April 21, with Fatah supporters calling for Meshaal to apologize for attacking the Fatah movement and for accusing it of betrayal. Former National Security Advisor Jibril Rajoub in a media interview accused Meshaal of crossing rhetorical redlines and noted that the 55 minutes speech was "not a slip of the tongue." Rajoub characterized the speech as an act better befitting a student council president, and accused Meshaal of insulting Fatah, its history, and the Presidency.

13. (C) Hundreds of Fatah activists, including gunmen, took to the streets of Gaza and some West Bank cities on April 21 and April 22 in protests. Some 1,000 protesters entered the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) building in Gaza and damaged the building. On April 22, students from the Islamic University in Gaza clashed with students from al-Azhar University, leaving 34 injured. On April 23, 3,000 security force personnel marched in Jenin, calling on Meshaal to back down from his statements and apologize. Fatah Youth Organization and al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades organizations released statements on April 23 accusing Meshaal of being a patron of civil war and saying the speech demonstrated that Fatah, rather than Hamas, was the backbone of the Palestinian national struggle.

Hamas Statements

14. (C) Meshaal has since accused commentators of taking his remarks out of context. He added that his speech had not targeted any particular faction. Several Hamas government officials distanced Meshaal's statements from the Hamas-led cabinet, but all Hamas statements unsurprisingly fell short of criticizing him.

Conciliation Efforts

15. (C) Representatives of the President and Prime Minister met in Gaza City on April 22 and 23, under Egyptian auspices, to discuss ways to tamp down the crisis. Presidential Chief of Staff Rafiq Hussein headed the delegation from the President's Office, while cabinet secretary Mohammed Awad chaired the government grouping. Both sides reportedly agreed to stop attacking each other in the media and to establish a dialogue committee to regularly meet and discuss controversial issues. They did not reach consensus on the issues that precipitated Meshaal's statement: the promotion of Abu Samhadanah and the creation of an additional security force. Both sides agreed that the issues should be addressed in a meeting between Abu Mazen and Prime Minister Hanniyyah when the President returns to the region at the end of the month. (Septel reviews the background behind the proposed Hamas security force and the April 23 attack on the Health Ministry in Gaza apparently defused by Hamas gunmen.)